

FOOD INSECURITY CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The aggregate index of agricultural production in Nigeria which has virtually remained in the hands of small holders has been on the decline thereby hindering the country's historical challenge of providing the basic needs for the people. Meanwhile, the country as a member of the United Nations has keyed into the number one goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is halving poverty and hunger by 2015. It is therefore against this background that this paper examines generally the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria and sustainable development. Other specific objectives include examining the causes and effects of food insecurity in Nigeria, identifying policies formulated, and evaluating the policies in order to make appropriate recommendations. The study found that the root causes of food insecurity include: poverty, corruption and national policies that do not promote equal access to food for all; and also that the country lacks storage and mechanization facilities and thus spends substantial income from oil on food importation. Research, farmers and extension linkages was poor. Therefore, it is recommended that there is need for a strong political will to transform the predominantly small holders to become efficient as is the case with the Japanese experience by ensuring that food storage policy place emphasis on small scale food storage operations, the mechanization of Nigerian agriculture must be based largely on indigenous engineering initiative and research-extension-farmers linkages be strengthen

and Nigeria will bid farewell to food insecurity for sustainable development.

Keywords: Food insecurity, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Policy, Small holders, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Reducing into half hunger and extreme poverty by 2015 is the priority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Millions of people worldwide suffer from hunger and under-nutrition. A major factor contributing to this international problem is food insecurity. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (3) this condition exists when people lack sustainable physical or economic access to enough safe, nutritious, and socially acceptable food for a healthy and productive life. Food insecurity may be chronic, seasonal, or temporal, and it may occur at the household, regional, or national level. (2) estimates that there are 840 million undernourished people in the world. The majority of these people reside in the developing countries including Nigeria. But what is sustainable development? According to the Brundtland report, it is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given;

and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

In the mean time, persistent hunger is still prevalent in Nigeria. This is eventually slowing down progress towards all other MDGs. As a matter of fact, no African country is seen to be working towards meeting the MDGs and Nigeria is no different. Large number of hungry people in Nigeria who are marginalized from work can also create social instability and conflict. This especially appears to be one reason for the persistent crisis in the Niger Delta region. While a national increase in production may generate more food and income, it does not always deliver food for everyone. Three pillars have been identified as effective for food security (12). These pillars are food availability, food accessibility, and food utilization. The problem of food insecurity mostly during the hungry period among farming households in Nigeria is long standing. The food crisis therefore once more awakened the Nigerian economy to the realities on ground for sustainable development. This perhaps explains the emphasis placed on fostering the tide of economic decline of the national economy. This situation provides the rationale for the choice of this topic and underscores the need to place before an august group of policy-makers, administrators and opinion leaders the strategies for achieving self-sufficiency in food production in Nigeria. This is so because the main goal of food security is for individual to be able to obtain adequate food needed at all times, and to be able to utilize the food to meet the body's needs. However, one hundred thousand hunger-related deaths every year, half of the children, testify to our failure to achieve national food security. Over 60 million Nigerians remain trapped in the spirals of hardship that hunger imposes a figure which continues to rise amidst the riches of 21st Century and the inflow of petrol-dollar into the country. The recent escalation of world food prices has transformed food insecurity in Nigeria from a difficult development problem into an emergency. The problem posed by hunger and malnutrition, arising from acute shortages of food has become critical in Nigeria. The country is now classified as one the countries experiencing hunger (12). The growing incident of food shortages as manifested in skyrocketing food prices and apparently low growth rate of agriculture underlines the problem in the food sector. This situation coupled with other policy related and implementation problem has severely constrained the productive capacity of Nigerians bringing about food insecurity and malnutrition

resulting in catastrophic amount of human suffering. The (12) estimated that approximately 60 percent of all childhood death in developing world is associated with chronic hunger and malnutrition. This places in focus the need for appropriate policies to ameliorate the food insecurity problem in Nigeria. The general objective of this paper therefore is to examine the problem of sustainable development and food insecurity in Nigeria. Other specific objectives include examining the causes and effects of food insecurity in Nigeria, identifying policies formulated to tackle food insecurity for sustainable development, evaluating the policies formulated and making appropriate recommendations for sustainable development and food security in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the root causes of food insecurity and unsustainable development include: poverty, corruption, national policies that do not promote equal access to food for all, environmental degradation, barriers to trade, insufficient agricultural development, population growth, low levels of education, social and gender inequality, poor health status, cultural insensitivity etc. Vulnerable groups include internally displaced people due to war and conflicts, marginal populations, (e.g., school dropouts, unemployed people, homeless and orphans); dependent populations (e.g., elderly people, children under five, and disabled and ill-people); as well as women of reproductive age, ethnic minorities; and low literacy households (1).

Food insecurity results in severe social, psychological, and behavioral consequences. Food-insecure individual may manifest feelings of alienation, powerlessness, stress, anxiety, and they may experience reduced productivity, reduced work and school performance as well as reduced income earnings. Household dynamics may become disrupted because of a preoccupation with obtaining food, which may lead to anger, pessimism, and irritability. Adverse consequences for children include higher levels of aggressive or destructive behavior, hyperacid, anxiety, difficulty with social interactions; increases passivity, increased school absences and a greater need for mental health care services. To understand the magnitude of food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition, one must consider himself to be in such shoes (10).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Nigeria. The population of the country is about 140,003,542 million with an annual growth rate of 2.8% (4). The country has over 350 ethnic groups with two major religions – Christianity and Islam as well as a land size of 923,768 sq. km (5). The Country is divided into 36

States with a Federal Capital Territory and 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs). The States are grouped into six geopolitical zones. It is situated on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa with Benin Republic, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad as her neighbors. Swamps and mangrove forests border the southern coast; inland are hardwood forests. Languages spoken in Nigeria include English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Fulani, and more than 340 other ethnic groups. The diversity in languages spoken in Nigeria is a reflection of how diverse the population is in terms of culture and the kind of activities they engage in with agriculture dominating. It is an evaluative study that critically examined food security policies for sustainable development among the entire citizenry to arrive at feasible working policies that ameliorate food insecurity in Nigeria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy consideration

A lot of policies have been formulated and implemented to tackle the problem of sustainable development and food insecurity in Nigeria, some of which are dealt with in this section, Policy of Food Storage Facilities (National Strategic Food Reserves). Agricultural production in Nigeria is seasonal and there are no storage facilities for highly perishable commodities. Commodities for which storage facilities exist, the same age-old contraption that entail huge losses are in use. The situation is such that during the harvest period, the market is inundated with freshly harvested commodities resulting in glut and farmers incur heavy losses. Due to this unfortunate situation, most farmers would usually curtail the production of these affected commodities during the next production season and scarcity would ensue. The need to provide a secure or fall-back market for farmers has become pressing, thus, the National Strategic Food Reserve Policy. In another development, the growing problem of deteriorating food insecurity in Nigeria has to do with price variations where no concrete action was taken in the past until recently to cushion the effects of production and price variation on consumption. As recent experiences in Nigeria indicate, domestic prices tend to rise and effective demand for food tends to decline as supply shortages and fluctuation persist. The primary objective of the food storage facilities policy is to hold the nation's food security stock thereby reducing post-harvest losses and providing the first line of food relief in time of stress.

There is also the marketing price stabilization objective whereby the Silos or Grain Reserves acts as buyers of last resort, ensuring that farmers have reasonable income by operating a guaranteed

minimum price scheme. In this connection, excess food grains that could not be absorbed by the market during the harvest period are absorbed by the storage scheme. The program will release food grains when necessary for price stabilization, with this, it is expected that adequate and affordable food will be supplied to the citizenry at all times for sustainable development.

Policy of Mechanization and Food Production

After several decades of development planning, Nigeria agriculture can at best be described as low input with rudimentary implements (8). To take a leap forward, some very important farm operations were mechanized through the agricultural mechanization scheme where tractors and other farm machineries were provided for hire by farmers to reduce drudgery and increase efficiency and farm size all geared toward sustainable development.

Policy on Food Importation

It is important to note that since domestic agricultural production failed to provide adequate food for the Nigerian populace, Nigeria had to spend considerable proportion of the output from other sectors of the economy to feed the teeming population through food imports. Precisely in 2008, the Federal Government of Nigeria spent a whole N80 billion to import rice from Thailand, and this has been the practice even in the past (8). But this cannot be sustainable development.

Evaluation of the policies formulated: Here we shall critically evaluate the policies formulated to ameliorate food insecurity problem and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Food storage policy

It should be emphasized that food insecurity problem in Nigeria may not be solved through the maintenance of large silos of grain reserves across the country. In recent months, government has reportedly released thousands of metric tons of grains from the National Strategic Food Reserve to bring down food prices, yet food prices have remained largely unchanged. In other words, the effects of the grains released are yet to be felt. Also to note is the inefficiency and corruption associated with government business and the difficult logistic problems of opening and maintaining the system of buying, transporting, storing and release of grains, the program may soon turn into another drain pipe. The food insecurity problem may be better addressed through a food storage policy that place emphasis on small scale food storage operations by farmers at the farm levels, and by traders/processors for sustainable development.

Mechanization and Food Production Policy

The vast majority of Nigerians are small holders and as such to put it point blank, there is yet no agricultural mechanization policy in Nigeria. No wonder, according to (11) the Nigerian agricultural sector remains an industry of inherent toilage, indigence, a world of drudgery for losers peopled by aged and ageing Nigerian, shunned and despised by Nigerian youths who regard the peasant farmers today as dreadful-anachronism. Furthermore, (9) indicated that this state of affairs has persisted apparently because of faulty mechanization policies; there is over dependence on foreign or alien ideas and advice and almost exclusive reliance on imported machines and equipment. To succeed, the mechanization of Nigerian agriculture must be based largely on indigenous engineering initiative, thus, the slogan: appropriate technology comes to play for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Food Importation Policy

In the case of food importation, capital which could have been conserved or accumulated for reinvestment in the Nigerian economy to further produce more goods and services or develop more social infrastructure is fritted away on food importation. It is therefore important to alert policy-makers of the great harm inflicted on the national economy by the liberal import and spendthrift policies. Rice importation for instance, dealt a heavy or killer blow to the farms and farmers in Okpoma, Ogoja, and Abakaliki and exposes our poor farmers to uncertainties bearing in mind the issue of balance of trade.

Agricultural Research Policy

The significance and impact of research on agricultural development in Nigeria would appear to be little (7), in view of the fact that farmers' yields are generally still far below yields obtained under experimental conditions in the research stations. Lack of enabling environment has been the failure to create the desirable complementarity between agricultural research system and extension system. Today, research findings are left to gather dust on the shelves in research laboratories instead of getting to farmers. In other words, inadequate funding and staffing and poor coordination of research activities is the order of the day. It is on this note that (6) asserted that government policies and agricultural development efforts should focus on small holder in Nigeria. The policy of establishing research institutes without adequate funding arrangement does not augur well with the situation of food insecurity in Nigeria and development cannot be said to be sustainable.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the small holder accounts for the bulk of agricultural production in Nigeria, efforts should be made to improve their productivity in order to bring food security for all and sustainable development in the country. This is because raising the output and incomes of these groups may provide the best approach for improvement. Finally, achievements of countries like Japan and others in successfully transforming their small holders confirm the fact that they are not inefficient as has been argued by some analysts. Let us start with giving serious minded small scale farmers the encouragement they need as an initial step to secure food for all Nigerians. What are required is the political will and the discipline to implement policies in the best interest of especially the poor and the rich and food insecurity would be a thing of the past and we can speak of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Based on the objectives of this paper, the following recommendations are hereby made that could help to tackle the country's food insecurity problem. (1) The food insecurity problems may be better addressed through a food storage policy that place emphasis on small scale food storage operations by farmers at the farm levels and by food traders and processors so as to promote efficient farm level storage facilities that can be owned and operated by farmers.

(1) Nigerians should begin to look inward to tap into local and indigenous forms of food preservative technologies rather than relying on aliens or foreign technologies which are sometimes not compatible or adaptable to our conditions. (2) Economic incentives should also be used to promote private investment in large scale, commercial food storage enterprises strategically located to serve farmers who cannot set up their own. (3) Mechanization and food production policies should be made to selectively mechanized aspects of Nigerian agriculture to remove drudgery and increase efficiency and farm size. (4) A broad base policy package covering several sectors and action areas is needed to solve the problem of food insecurity in Nigeria. (5) There should be an increase in farmer's access to improved production inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and other agro-chemicals to boost production. (6) Rural areas should be made attractive by provision of social infrastructural facilities and amenities and deliberately creating non-farm job opportunities in the rural areas to reduce rural-urban drift. (7) The linkage between research institutes and farmers should be strengthened by enhancing the number and quantity of extension personnel's. Therefore, a deliberate funding potential would go a long way to reduce the incidence of food insecurity in Nigeria and help to achieve MDGs' first

priority of halving hunger and extreme poverty by 2015.

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